

VZCZCXRO1109
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0030/01 0070845
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 070845Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1122
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000030

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/07/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: NEXT SPEAKER OF THE IRAQI PARLIAMENT - A HERD OF DARK HORSES

REF: A. 08 BAGHDAD 4007
IB. 08 BAGHDAD 4019

Classified By: Robert Ford for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: There is currently no clear Sunni Arab candidate emerging to succeed the erratic Mahmoud Mashhadani, who flamed out late last month (reftel) as speaker the Council of Representatives (CoR), Iraq's parliament. There is much jockeying for position, however, among the (Sunni Arab) National Dialogue Council (NDC) and Hewar, as well as among independent Sunnis. Leading Iraqi Islamic Party candidates Ayad al Samarraie and Osama al Tikriti could be disqualified by their dual citizenship. Non-IIP Sunnis are trying to claim a place at the leadership table, but they seem only a herd of dark horses. There is even discussion of bringing Mashhadani back. Given Kurdish adamancy that Mashhadani go, it is inconceivable that they, or the Shi'a, would accept his return. The Shi'a and Kurds have so far been mostly silent about who they want, although there are rumors that they might favor either former speaker (and Sunni Arab) Hachem al-Hassani or having First Deputy Speaker Khalid al Attiya remain as acting speaker for the foreseeable future. End summary.

To IIP or Not To IIP

¶12. (C) Leaders of Tawafuq ("Accord") Front, the Sunni parliamentary bloc, have declared publicly and privately that the next speaker must be drawn from their ranks, per the (informal) agreement that established the current government. Tawafuq, however, is essentially now the IIP, since the NDC, led by Khalaf Al-Alayyan, and the Independents' bloc, withdrew from Tawafuq as a result of the Mashhadani ouster. Al-Alayyan even announced publicly that Tawafuq no longer existed. Thus, if the speaker indeed comes from Tawafuq, he will be IIP.

¶13. (C) We are hearing of at least two issues with the IIP among the Sunni MPs. First, as NDC parliamentarian Taha al Luhaiby insisted to poloff, the IIP already controls all the Sunni leadership positions in government; the CoR speaker must therefore not be IIP, in his view. Nada Ibrahim (Hewar) echoed this position, and there are hints that many independent Sunnis support it. Even Shatha al Obosy, a fairly loyal IIP member, allowed that if the better candidate were not Tawafuq, it could be acceptable. Hachem al-Hassani (a Sunni Arab independent and a potential speaker himself) claimed even PM Maliki didn't want an IIP speaker. He told poloff that Maliki and Dawa were being disingenuous with the IIP leadership, making vague promises to them, while discussing alternative candidates with other parties.

¶14. (C) The IIP's leading names, Ayad al Samarraie and Osama al Tikriti, have potential liabilities. Al Samarraie, a staid and erudite deal-maker, is well-known as a party and bloc leader. Tikriti, while a senior IIP member and from an influential tribe in Salah ad Din province, has been largely inactive and frequently absent. Several CoR members have

expressed doubt that either would be strong enough to lead the ever-fractious parliament. Additionally, MP Adnan al Juboori (Sunni Independent), told us January 5 that both al Samarraie and al Tikriti are also British citizens, and the constitution specifically disallows dual citizenship in any individual "who assumes a senior, security or sovereign position." Thus, according to the Iraqi constitution, al-Samarrarie and Tikriti must either abandon their British citizenship, or abandon their candidacy.

If Not IIP/Tawafuq, Then Who? The Other Sunnis

15. (C) The non-IIP Sunni members of Parliament have been Q5. (C) The non-IIP Sunni members of Parliament have been throwing out other Sunni names like candy. The most notable/frequently heard names include NDC MPs Khalaf al Alayyan, Hassan Deghan al-Janabi, Khalil Jaddu, and Taha al Luhaiby; Hewar MPs Saleh al Mutlak and Mohammed al Tamim (aka Mohammed Hussein al Jaboori); and an independent, Hachem al Hassani. Of the above names, al Luhaiby and al Alayyan are categorically unacceptable to the Shia Islamist party ISCI and the Kurds, given their history of sectarianism and ties with the former Sunni insurgency, according to Mithal al Alusi (Umma) and al Hassani. Al Hassani also related that Al Mutlak reportedly did not want the position.

16. (C) Of those remaining, three pop up frequently: Jaddu, al Tamim, and al Hassani. Jaddu and al Tamim have small parties supporting them, and perhaps also the July 22nd group (recently renamed - again - the Parliamentary Coordinating Group or PCG). Al Hassani, a former minister of industry and speaker of the Transitional parliament, prefers not to have

BAGHDAD 00000030 002 OF 002

an office at the CoR (he says). Several Sunnis and even some Kurds have identified him as a potentially acceptable and even capable leader. Al Luhaiby and Ibrahim, however, pointed out that al Hassani is a Sunni Turkman, and not an Arab. As such he might not be acceptable to the PCG.

Ending the quota system?

17. (C) Although highly unlikely, there are also rumors that the next speaker might not be Sunni Arab. At least two CoR members have indicated that there are several (unnamed) groups in the CoR who have said that the next speaker could be Shi'a. Both al Hassani and Husam al Azawy (Iraqiya) claimed that these same groups are saying that perhaps it is time to end the quota system. Al Hassani was more specific, saying that individuals from Iraqiyya and the PCG had been floating the idea of a non-Sunni leader, and that there was some receptivity among some (unnamed) MPs. A variation on the "Shi'a-speaker-option" according to al Hassani was to sideline the issue and keep Khalid al Attiya (UIA) as Acting Speaker indefinitely. The IIP's al Obosy, while concerned about the tenure of such an arrangement, very non-committally allowed that it might be a short-term solution. When poloff pointed out to one contact that CoR bylaws required selection of the speaker at the start of the next session, the contact smirked and inquired (presumably rhetorically) "When have Iraqis followed the law?"

Mashhadani has NOT left the building

18. (C) Like Elvis, reports of Mashhadani's political death may be exaggerated. Several CoR contacts informed poloff that Mashhadani hosted at least one meeting of MPs in his home to discuss strategy. Additionally, Adnan al Juboori informed us that there was a move afoot to return Mashhadani to the speaker's position, openly averring that Mashhadani was the only person strong enough to ensure completion of all the important legislation currently on the agenda. Al Jaboori also insisted there was a legal way to reinstate Mashhadani

both to his seat and to the speaker's position; according to Iraqi law, a government employee can cancel his resignation from government service within thirty days of his resignation. (Thus, this theory goes, Mashadani could return to the parliament as a regular member and then be re-elected.) Additionally, Usama al Najafi (INL) issued a public statement supporting Mashhadani's leadership and instead blaming rivals for the former speaker's perceived failures. Al Najafi also announced the PCG would meet after the holiday to address the situation. (Note: Mashhadani is a member of the PCG. End Note.)

Comment What Next?

¶9. (C) There is clearly no consensus candidate among the Sunni Arabs, Tawafuq or otherwise. Most MPs are vacationing in Amman, Beirut and Damascus, where negotiations are probably occurring. Most Sunni Arabs remain confident that the speaker will/should be Sunni Arab, but names are floating around like confetti on New Year's Eve. Moreover, given the glacial pace of Iraqi parliamentary action, a delay in choosing the next speaker is highly likely. And naturally, any delay in electing a speaker will likely delay consideration of important legislation such as the new budget.

¶10. (C) Additionally, murmurs of either an al Attiya caretaker speakership or a Shi'a speaker may indicate political opportunists using Sunni Arab indecision to promote a non-Sunni candidate. There is currently little information from the Shi'a and Kurdish parties which, if any, Sunni candidate they might accept, as they are likely adopting a candidate they might accept, as they are likely adopting a "wait-and-see" attitude. If the delay is too long, however, an "acting" al Attiya speakership may be the most likely action. This scenario could aggravate the deadlock over key issues between parliament's blocs and stunt the CoR's institutional development. End comment.

CROCKER